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Front Matter -- Quaker Religious Thought, nos. 106-107

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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QUAKER RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Double Issue: Cumulative Numbers 106-107

November 2006

Sponsored by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group

(<http://theo-discuss.quaker.org/>)

The purpose of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group is to explore the meaning and implications of our Quaker faith and religious experience through discussion and publication. This search for unity in the claim of truth upon us concerns both the content and application of our faith.

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

As a double issue, *QRT* #s 106-107 contains several significant sets of essays that complement each other well. The first set involves four essays on spiritual discernment and Quaker decision making, involving individual and corporate aspects of the venture. Chuck Conniry and I presented our papers two years ago at the QTDG meetings in San Antonio, and they both represent work that we are doing on a larger set of projects. Chuck is working on a book-length treatment of discernment, and I am directing a Lilly grant on congregational discernment (website: discernment.georgefox.edu) designed to work with eight different denominations on how to develop and incorporate into their polities a consensus decision-making process on various organizational levels. We feel privileged to be able to share with readers of *Quaker Religious Thought* on the fruit of our labors.

Bruce Bishop, Lon Fendall, and Jan Wood have been working with meetings, congregations, and groups in helping them implement processes of spiritual discernment, and Bruce has also done some significant work with youth and young adults in this subject. As well as helping us understand what signs of discernment might be, Bruce also shares wisdom on how to develop a Committee for Clearness, which may be of interest to those who are seeking divine guidance on particular subjects and decisions. Eden Grace contributed her essay from afar, as she and her family are serving Friends in Kenya helping to establish an African Ministries Office for Friends United Meeting. Eden has served on the Central Committee on the World Council of Churches, and she has done a good deal of teaching other Christian leaders about the Quaker decision-making process—how it works, and the spiritual basis for it. Amazingly, within the last few years, the World Council of Churches has *voted not to vote*, but to use a spiritual-discernment consensus-type process. This move follows also the transition of the Uniting Church of Australia toward a consensus decision-making process in 1997. Eden walks us through the history of the WCC developments, in which she played a major personal role. I should say that her own essays on Quaker business method deserve to be considered on her website, as well (edengrace.org); her contribution below re-crafts some of her earlier work into a helpful narrative.

The second set of essays is not unrelated. Building on the theme of “Quaker Contributions to American Democracy,” these three papers were presented at last year’s QTDG meetings, appropriately, in

Philadelphia. It can indeed be argued that the Bill of Rights was patterned after William Penn's Charter, as well as other state charters and documents, and the democratic notion that every person may play a role in civic decisions and directions bears strong associations with the Quaker conviction that access to the divine will is inclusive, rather than exclusive. One might even trace connections between early Friends' communicating to Charles II that they would neither be swearing oaths of loyalty, nor would they be disloyal in the sense of taking up arms against the King. The concept of a loyal opposition developed soon thereafter, and democratic approaches to theocracy soon replaced monarchic approaches to the same. Therefore, while Friends have resisted voting and divisive, win-lose parliamentary modes of decision making, at the heart of one-person-one-vote approaches to democracy is the belief that the discernment of each person deserves to play a role in collective processes of discernment. Then again, the majority might not always capture the divine will.

This being the case, Stephen Angell contributes a significant essay on the legacy of pluralism in American democracy, showing how, from various angles, Quakers helped establish a culture of unity within diversity in Pennsylvania, and therefore in America. Likewise, Jane Calvert shows us how Quakers contributed significantly to American traditions of civil disobedience in the forming of American democracy. Challenging established systems for Friends *did not begin* with the abolitionist cause; it had a long and rich history before that. Finally, Emma Lapsansky-Werner responds to these essays and helps us make sense of their implications for later generations. What we see in these papers on Friendly contributions to American democracy is the application of Quaker convictions about discerning the divine will as applied within and interacting with the political sphere beyond religious settings. While one-person-one-vote systems allow a democratic distribution of leader-selection, discernment within the public sphere is far more profound than a mere leveraging and tallying of votes. It goes to the core of corporate truth-seeking, itself.

Our book review for this double issue features two books by Ben Pink Dandelion; *The Liturgies of Quakerism* being one that he authored, and *Towards Tragedy/Reclaiming Hope* being one that he edited. Reviewers Hugh Barbour and Ruth Pitman are long-time leaders in the development of QTDC and *QRT*, and their seasoned judgments complement each other nicely. Ben's response, then, takes the discussions further, and not only is the reader helped with getting a

sense of what each of these books does, but one is also aided in considering their implications and ongoing explorations of their impact.

The final essay is a summary of the letter to the Vatican I was asked to write three years ago by Ann Riggs, Director of the Faith & Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ. As well as being sent to the Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity, this essay was published in *One in Christ*, a British Catholic ecumenical journal, in January 2005 (georgefox.edu/discernment/petrine.pdf). Responses have been engaging, and Newton Garver's response (friend-sjournal.org/contents/2006/0906/garver.html) was published in the September issue of *Friends Journal*, followed by mine. Recently, I was invited to accompany Nancy Irving, General Secretary of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, to the Conference for Secretaries of World Christian Communion in the Vatican last month (October), where the topic for discussion was "Visions of Christian Unity." Within those discussions I sought to extend a vision of Christian unity organized around the common Christian pilgrimage of seeking to live under the lordship and leadership of Christ. This was Everett Cattell's appeal for unity among Friends at the 1970 Faith and Life Conference in St. Louis, and I believe it could provide a way forward among the worldwide communion of believers, as well. We also had an audience with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican, and we met with Cardinal Walter Kasper in the offices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian unity. More is shared on those meetings, below.

Our Quaker Theological Discussion Group meetings this year will feature two sessions; the first will address aspects of Truth and Power, and the second will involve a review of Ben Richmond's new book, *Signs of Salvation*. We are delighted to have first-rate presenters, including Newton Garver of New York University, Shannon Craigo Snell of Yale University, and Miroslav Volf of Yale University. The review session will include reviews by Brian Drayton, a leading Friends thinker and educator in New England, and Jacqui Welling professor of history at Malone College. Ben Richmond will respond to the reviews in person. Join us if you can, and thanks also for your support of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group and *Quaker Religious Thought*! Our next issue will feature responses to the reviews of *QRT* in the previous issue by former editors and others.

Happy reading, reflecting, and doing!

— Paul Anderson

Quaker Theological Discussion Group

Friday, November 17, 2006

Washington, DC

Session I, 1:00-3:30 pm

Washington Convention Center, Room 159 A

Theme: *Truth and Power*

Paul Anderson (George Fox University) Presiding

“*Speaking Truth to Power*” Newton Garver (State University of New York)

“*Empowering the Truth*” Shannon Craigo-Snell (Yale University)

Response and Reflections on Truth, Memory, and Reconciliation, Miroslav Volf (Yale Divinity School)

Discussion

Session II, 7:00-8:30 pm

Washington Convention Center, Room 159 A

Review of *Signs of Salvation* by Ben Richmond

Ann Riggs (NCCC Faith & Order Commission) Presiding

First Review, Jacci Welling (Malone College)

Second Review, Brian Drayton (Weare Monthly Meeting)

Response, Ben Richmond (West Richmond Friends Meeting)

Discussion